
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Proposed No-Drop (ND)-9 Location

United States Air Force
366 CES/CEV
1100 Liberator Street, Building 1297
Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho 83648

June 2001

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFI	Air Force Instruction
Air Force	United States Air Force
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CDC	Conservation Data Center
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
EA	Environmental Assessment
EC	Electronic Combat
EIAP	Environmental Impact Analysis Process
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
ETI	Enhanced Training in Idaho
GOLD	Greater Owyhee Legal Defense
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
National Register	National Register of Historic Places
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
PL	Public Law
ROD	Record of Decision
SIG	Settlement Implementation Group
SROD	Supplemental Record of Decision
USC	United States Code
VRM	Visual Resource Management

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

1.0 NAME OF ACTION

Location of the No-Drop (ND)-9 target site, Owyhee County, Idaho.

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

The United States Air Force proposes to construct a no-drop target (known as ND-9) on a site west of Idaho State Highway 51 in Owyhee County, Idaho. The Air Force proposes to lease approximately 2.66 acres of undeveloped private property surrounded by public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). BLM rights-of-way for access to the site will be obtained.

Under the no action alternative, the Air Force will not construct ND-9 at the site analyzed in this Environmental Assessment, but will continue to work with the Bureau of Land Management, Greater Owyhee Legal Defense Fund, State of Idaho, Shoshone-Paiute Tribes, and selected Owyhee County representatives to locate a suitable site for the construction of a no-drop target.

3.0 SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The Environmental Assessment concluded that no resources would experience any significant impacts. The analysis of environmental conditions contained in this assessment addresses only those areas and resources with the potential to be affected by the proposed action or no action alternatives; locations and resources with no potential to be affected were not further analyzed.

Potential impacts to biological, cultural, and visual resources were analyzed. The construction of ND-9 would have no adverse effects to biological resources. No adverse impacts are anticipated to vegetation or wildlife on the site. No archaeological sites or isolates, and no historic structures were identified within the project area; therefore, no cultural resources will be impacted. Visual impacts will not be significant, as construction related to the location of the site is not expected to affect the viewshed.

Under the no action alternative, conditions will remain unchanged and no environmental effects are anticipated.

4.0 CONCLUSION

On the basis of the findings of the Environmental Assessment, no significant impact to human health or the natural environment would be expected from implementation of the proposed action. Therefore, issuance of a Finding of No Significant Impact is warranted and preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (Public Law 91-190), is not required.


JEFFREY W. EBERHART, Col, USAF
366th Wing, Vice Commander

25 MAY 01
Date

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
1.0 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background	1
1.2.1 Project Background	1
1.2.2 Location	2
1.3 Purpose and Need	2
1.4 Public Involvement	2
1.5 Organization of the Environmental Assessment	3
2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES.....	4
2.1 Proposed Action	4
2.2 No Action Alternative	6
3.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT	6
3.1 Biological Resources.....	6
3.1.1 Vegetation	6
3.1.2 Wildlife	7
3.2 Cultural Resources	8
3.3 Visual Resources.....	8
4.0 DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES	8
4.1 Biological Resources.....	8
4.1.1 Proposed Action	8
4.1.2 No Action	8
4.2 Cultural Resources	9
4.2.1 Proposed Action	9
4.2.2 No Action	9
4.3 Visual Resources.....	9
4.3.1 Proposed Action	9
4.3.2 No Action	9
4.4 Cumulative Impacts.....	9
5.0 REFERENCES	10
6.0 LIST OF PREPARERS	11

FIGURES

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
1-1 Regional Location of Juniper Butte Range, No-Drop Targets, and Emitters	3
2-1 Representative of ND-9 Construction Plans.....	5

1.0 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

The Enhanced Training in Idaho (ETI) project includes the Juniper Butte Range, five no-drop target areas, thirty emitter sites, and associated access roads. A Record of Decision (ROD) for ETI was signed in March 1998. Subsequent to the ROD, it was determined that a different no-drop target site from ND-8 would likely reduce potential environmental consequences. This Environmental Assessment (EA) addresses the construction of this site known as ND-9 by the United States Air Force (Air Force) in southwestern Idaho. The proposed action consists of construction of one no-drop target site in Owyhee County, Idaho. The no-action alternative is to not develop the no-drop site at the proposed location and to continue efforts with the conservation partners to locate a suitable site for the construction of a no-drop site.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Air Force is proposing to construct one no-drop target site (ND-9) in Owyhee County, Idaho. This EA has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) (42 United States Code [USC] 4321-4347), Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] § 1500-1508), and Air Force Instruction (AFI) 32-7061, The Environmental Impact Analysis Process (EIAP).

1.2 BACKGROUND

1.2.1 Project Background

Extensive environmental analysis was performed for the Department of the Air Force's *Enhanced Training in Idaho Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)* (April 1997) and *Final EIS* (January 1998). In March 1998, the ETI ROD was signed. In April 1998, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued findings and recommendations identifying issues to be resolved. The BLM recommendations resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Air Force and BLM in June 1998. In September 1998, the Supplemental Record of Decision (SROD) was signed and the MOU was incorporated into the SROD. In October 1998, the Juniper Butte Range Withdrawal Act (Public Law [PL] 105-261) approved the Juniper Butte withdrawal and directed the Air Force and BLM to begin implementing the actions associated with ETI. The Air Force and BLM became co-defendants in a lawsuit with the Greater Owyhee Legal Defense (GOLD) Fund. A Settlement Agreement was reached in November 1999. This agreement resolved litigation and established the Settlement Implementation Group (SIG) for continued coordination between parties. SIG members include the Air Force, BLM, and GOLD partners. In addition to the SIG, the Air Force will coordinate with the State of Idaho, Shoshone-Paiute Tribes, and selected Owyhee County representatives, hereafter known as the conservation partners.

Environmental Assessment
Proposed No-Drop (ND-9) Location

In the Settlement Agreement, the Air Force agreed to not construct the no-drop target area on the parcel of withdrawn land known as ND-8; but to seek an operationally suitable location in consultation with conservation partners.

1.2.2 Location

ND-9 is a proposed, approximately 2.66-acre, no-drop target site (with associated access) to be used in conjunction with the Air Force training mission in southwest Idaho. The no-drop target is used for simulated ordnance delivery and is located adjacent to Idaho State Highway 51 approximately 7 miles south of Grasmere, Idaho. The area includes portions of a private road and land located in Township 13 South, Range 4 East, Sections 11 and 14 (U.S. Geological Survey [USGS] 1979). Figure 1-1 depicts the location of the proposed site.

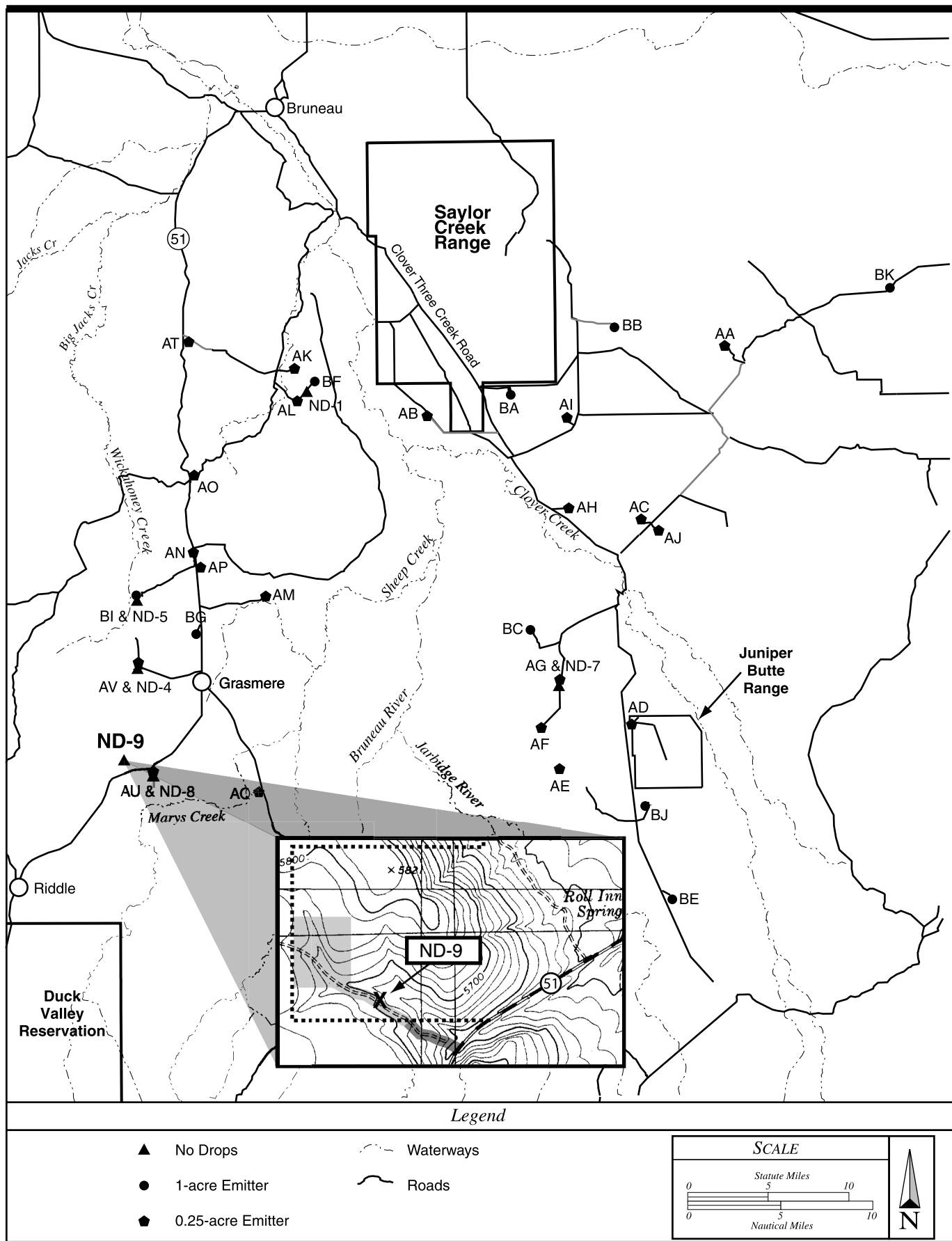
1.3 PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the proposed siting and construction of this replacement no-drop target is to support the implementation of the ETI project. No-drop targets are a key component of a training environment that is designed to balance realistic training with the environment and traditional land uses. No-drop targets have been located in a manner that is environmentally suitable and operationally beneficial to aircrews. No-drop targets located in a way that realistically simulate likely target areas are essential; allowing aircrews to approach multiple targets at the same time, from many directions, using precise timing. The no-drop targets can be used individually, in groups, or in conjunction with drop targets. The combination of no-drop targets geographically separated from other facilities on a tactical training range optimizes the amount of training.

This action is needed to allow more flexible and realistic training opportunities. No-drop targets offer a way to build targets that are matched to the sophisticated aircraft systems and demanding training requirements of the 366th Wing. Aircrews use no-drop targets to practice finding and aiming at a target without actually dropping training ordnance. These targets raise the complexity and quality of aircrew training.

1.4 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The Air Force prepared this EA according to AFI 32-7061, The Environmental Impact Analysis Process. A printed public notice announced the availability of the draft and a formal public comment period was held. Following the announcement and a 30-day comment period, agency comments were received from the BLM Lower Snake River District and the State of Idaho Military Affairs office. In addition to the formal comment period, the Air Force sought input from the conservation partners interested in the siting of ND-9. This Final EA incorporates comments received on the Draft EA.



1.5 ORGANIZATION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

This EA considers the potential consequences to the human and natural environment that may result from construction of this site. Under NEPA, the analysis of environmental conditions should address only those areas and environmental resources with the potential to be affected by the proposed action or no action alternatives; locations and resources with no potential to be affected need not be analyzed. Potential impacts to the following resources were analyzed:

- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Visual Resources

Chapter 1.0 provides background information of the proposed action and discusses its purpose and need. Chapter 2.0 describes the proposed action and alternatives. Chapter 3.0 describes baseline conditions (i.e., the conditions against which the potential impacts of the proposed action or alternatives are measured) for each of the resource areas, while Chapter 4.0 describes environmental impacts of the proposed action or alternatives on the resources. Chapter 5.0 contains references used for the preparation of this EA, including documents and correspondence. Chapter 6.0 lists the preparers.

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1 PROPOSED ACTION

The Air Force proposes to construct a no-drop target (known as ND-9) on a site west of Idaho State Highway 51 in Owyhee County, Idaho (refer to Figure 1-1). The area includes portions of a private road and land located in T. 13 S., R. 4 E., Sections 11 and 14.

The proposed site is owned by Mr. Curtis Strickland. The Air Force proposes to lease approximately 2.66 acres. The site is open, undeveloped property surrounded by undeveloped public land administered by the BLM. Access to the site begins with approximately 833 feet of BLM road from State Highway 51. A private road links the BLM road to the site. A detailed description of the road and site property is included in the lease agreement and BLM rights-of-way application.

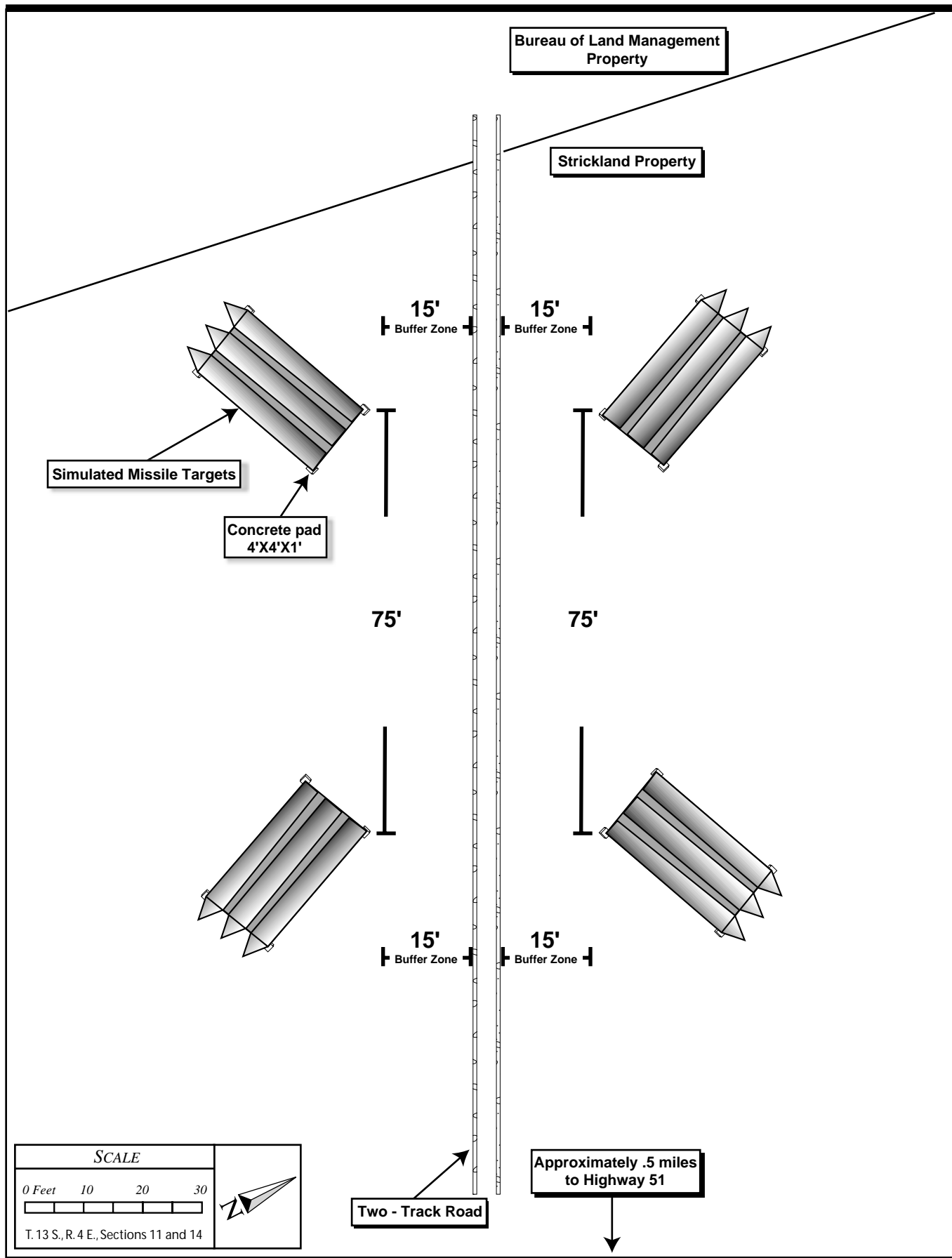


Figure 2-1
Representative of ND-9 Site and Construction Plans

Environmental Assessment
Proposed No-Drop (ND-9) Location

The site includes a private two-track road which bisects the site and runs along a dry gulch. Proposed improvements include four sets of simulated surface-to-air missiles, each mounted on four concrete pads (approximately 4 feet x 4 feet x 1 foot) that would rest on top of existing soil. Each set of simulated missiles would be located 15 feet from the road and approximately 75 feet apart. Figure 2-1 depicts construction plans for the site.

Aircrews will approach targets and simulate ordnance delivery, but no ordnance of any kind would be used. Most aircraft will not directly overfly the targets during simulated low-level delivery of ordnance. However, a small number of aircraft may practice tactics that result in flying across the target area. The aircraft would follow all applicable flight or altitude restrictions and would fly profiles similar to those for restricted areas.

2.2 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under this alternative the Air Force will continue to work with the conservation partners to locate a suitable site for the construction of a five-acre no-drop site.

3.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The proposed action would occur in sparsely populated Owyhee County located within the Snake River Plain geologic and physiographic province. The county's dominant landscape features are rolling plateaus, low buttes, and highly dissected canyons. Land use in the project area consists predominately of grazing. Other county land uses include agricultural, mining, recreation, and military land uses.

This chapter presents information on environmental conditions for resources potentially affected by the proposed action and no action alternative described in Chapter 2.0.

3.1 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

A biological resources survey of the site was conducted in early May 2000. During the survey, no special status species were observed. Consultation with the Idaho Conservation Data Center (CDC) revealed that there were no protected, rare, or sensitive plant or wildlife species on the site.

3.1.1 Vegetation

The proposed ND-9 site lies within the Intermountain Desert Province, which is characterized by low rainfall, strong temperature contrasts between summer and winter, and sparse xerophytic shrub vegetation (Bailey 1995). Most of the project area is a low sagebrush (*Artemisia arbuscula*) association. However, the western portion (northeastern aspect) of the site is dominated by big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) with scattered antelope bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*). Understory components within both shrub canopies include Idaho fescue (*Festuca*

Environmental Assessment
Proposed No-Drop (ND-9) Location

idahoensis), bluebunch wheatgrass (*Pseudoregneria spiculatum*), blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium montanum*), carpet phlox (*Phlox hoodii*), long-leaved phlox (*Phlox longifolia*), larkspur (*Delphinium bicolor*), blue-eyed-Mary (*Collinsia parviflora*), arnica (*Arnica spp.*), bluebells (*Mertensia spp.*), and buckwheat (*Eriogonum spp.*). Impacts from livestock grazing around the proposed ND-9 Site appear moderate to low and few weeds (cheat grass [*Bromus tectorum*]) were observed.

Two seeps, each containing potential wetlands, were evident outside of the ND-9 survey area, but within the survey area along the road. One seep is dammed to create a stock pond which lies adjacent to the road approximately midway between the proposed ND-9 site and Highway 51. Vegetation around the stock pond included big sagebrush, sedge (*Carex spp.*), rushes (*Juncus spp.*), Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), bulbous bluegrass (*Poa bulbosa*), golden banner (*Thermopsis rhombifolia*), and dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*). Livestock grazing impacts around the stock pond were moderate to heavy.

The second seep, along the survey road, is several hundred feet northwest of the pond, approximately 30 meters (100 feet) east of the access road. Rushes dominate this seep. Livestock grazing impact at this seep appeared moderate.

3.1.2 Wildlife

No special status animal species were observed during the survey. Four sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) pellet groups were detected, although all pellets found were white and desiccated. No other evidence of sage grouse use was detected during the survey. Bird species observed included turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*), mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), Wilson's phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*) (the mallard and phalarope were on the stock pond), horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris*), Brewer's sparrow (*Spizella breweri*), vesper sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*), western meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*), and Brewer's blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*). All bird species observed are known or likely breeders within Owyhee County (Stephens and Sturts 1998). Other than turkey vultures, no raptors were observed during the survey. No trees, shrubs, cliffs, or suitable burrows were available for nesting raptors on the site. There is possible nest habitat for ground nesting raptors such as northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) and short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus*), but the site is generally dry and not ideally suited for these species.

The combination of boulders and big sagebrush in the western portion of the site created ample cavities for small mammal use and several small burrows under rocks were observed. An inactive den system likely used in the past by coyotes (*Canis latrans*) was found within the road survey area.

Mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) and Pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*) pellets were both detected within the area. However, limited sign (tracks or pellets), and the unbrowsed condition of scattered antelope bitterbrush, (preferred browse) indicate moderate to low use of the area by these species.

3.2 CULTURAL RESOURCES

A cultural resource survey of the site was conducted in early May and July 2000. No cultural resources were identified within the project area on BLM land. One historic archaeological site was located on private land. This site is recommended as ineligible for the National Register of Historic Places (National Register). No other archaeological sites or isolates, and no historic structures were identified within the project area. No further archaeological work is recommended.

3.3 VISUAL RESOURCES

The site is an open undeveloped area that is accessed, but not visible, from State Highway 51. The site is dominated by low shrubs and grasses and has moderate topographic relief.

The proposed site is located in BLM Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class III area. Class III areas may include roads and developed areas. The usual resources of this class tend to be homogenous in terms of shape, form, and color, or have been modified by development (e.g., roads). Changes in the landscape are acceptable, but should remain subordinate to the existing landscape.

4.0 DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This chapter presents an assessment of the potential environmental impacts of implementing the proposed action or no action alternative. The analysis presented in this chapter is based on an examination of the potential direct and indirect impacts of the proposed action or alternatives (refer to Chapter 2.0) on baseline conditions (refer to Chapter 3.0). Cumulative effects of the proposed action with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions are presented at the conclusion of this chapter.

4.1 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

4.1.1 Proposed Action

Under this alternative, construction of the ND-9 site would occur. Ground disturbance would be minimal. Habitat degradation due to the construction or annual monitoring of the site is not likely to occur. No significant impacts to biological resources are anticipated.

4.1.2 No Action

Under this alternative the no-drop target site would not be located at the proposed ND-9 site. Biological resources would remain unchanged from their present status.

4.2 CULTURAL RESOURCES

4.2.1 Proposed Action

Under this alternative, construction of the ND-9 site would occur. Ground disturbance would be minimal. Impacts to cultural resources are not expected.

4.2.2 No Action

Under this alternative the no-drop target site would not be located at the proposed ND-9 site. Cultural resources would remain unchanged from their present status.

4.3 VISUAL RESOURCES

4.3.1 Proposed Action

Under this alternative, construction of the ND-9 site would occur. Ground disturbance would be minimal. Location of equipment, including concrete blocks and grounding rods would be acceptable in VRM Class III. No impacts to visual resources are affected, and the site is not expected to affect the viewshed from Little Blue Table (identified as an area of concern during the ETI EIAP) or other area viewsheds.

4.3.2 No Action

Under this alternative the no-drop target site would not be located at the proposed ND-9 site. Visual resources would remain unchanged from their present status.

4.4 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

CEQ regulations stipulate that the cumulative effects analysis within an EA should consider the potential environmental impacts resulting from “the incremental impacts of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonable foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions” (40 CFR 1508.7).

There are no other identified activities on or in the immediate vicinity of ND-9 that would have the potential to impact biological, cultural, or visual resources.

The proposed ND-9 site is approximately one-quarter mile from the Grasmere electronic combat (EC) site. Although increased vehicular trips for site maintenance may occur, the effects would be negligible. No significant cumulative impacts involving the ND-9 site are anticipated under either the proposed action or no action alternative.

5.0 REFERENCES

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